

# **NOMI Final Report**

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NOMI  
Final Report

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## **Introduction**

The NOMI Project (NOMI pronounced like "Get To Know Me") started as a group of real estate professionals and others interested in changing the perception of North Minneapolis through grassroots word of mouth, to be later supplemented by larger efforts in the media. The group distributed brochures listing many of the positive assets of the area. The GLBT Northsiders group conducted a series of "Get to NOMI" tours for potential homebuyers over the summer of 2008.

A research assistant was hired to research economic sustainability and the assets that lead to positive community development. Additionally, the student research assistant conducted focus groups to supplement the research and gain information about perceptions of North Minneapolis. The goal of the focus groups was to determine how first-time homebuyers define community "assets" and what assets are important to them, so that The NOMI Project could use the information to market North Minneapolis as a livable community. The proposed final products were a report that summarizes the findings of the focus groups of first-time homebuyers and the beginnings of an inventory of identified assets in North Minneapolis.

### **There are three addendums to this report:**

1. Focus Group/Interview Questions
2. Focus Group and Interview Transcriptions
3. North Minneapolis Asset Inventory and Business List

## Research

Many believe that successful community development is due to focusing on the positives- not the negatives or things that need to be fixed. John Walker, author of *Building from Strength: Asset-Based Community Development* explains that:

Too often when approaching community improvement, people focus on what is wrong and requires fixing. Now there is a better way. Instead of occupying themselves with a community's deficits, forward-thinking organizations are identifying and building on local assets. After all, even the most troubled community has strengths. Once people's eyes are opened to community assets, a positive energy for change takes over.<sup>1</sup>

To do this it is important to look at a community through an asset lens instead of a needs lens. You may be asking what exactly do we mean by "asset," the Community Toolbox does an excellent job explaining what is considered an asset:

What is a community asset?

Our definition is broad. A community asset (or community resource, a very similar term) is anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life. And this means:

It can be a person -- the master mechanic down the street who can fix any car ever made.

The stay-at-home mom or dad who organizes a playgroup. The church member who starts a discussion group on spirituality. Or a star high school athlete, a coach, a cheerleader, or a fan in the stands. These are all community assets.

It can be a physical structure or place -- a school, hospital, church, library, recreation center, social club. It could be a town landmark or symbol. It might also be an unused building that could house a community hospice, or a second floor room ideal for community meetings. Or it might be a public place that already belongs to the community park, a wetland, or other open space.

It can be a business that provides jobs and supports the local economy.

You are a community asset, too, and so are your friends, and the people you know, and the people you don't know yet. When you walk down the street, there are assets all around you.

This is a very encouraging and promising way of seeing the world.

And actually, in a true sense of the word, everyone living in the community is a community asset -- at least potentially so, and probably really so. This is good news, because it suggests

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bos.frb.org/commdev/c&b/2006/winter/building.pdf>

that everyone in the community can be a force for community improvement if only we knew what their assets are, and could put them to use.<sup>2</sup>

To complete asset mapping and an asset inventory to showcase the assets of a community and build ownership and pride for its residents. Lionel J. Beaulieu, author of *Mapping the Assets of Your Community: A Key component for Building Local Capacity* agrees and says that “No matter what community you are talking about, or how big or small the community might be in terms of population, community groups that begin taking a hard look at their community by first documenting all of its “problems,” are already starting things off on the wrong foot.”<sup>3</sup> Both Walker and Beaulieu agree that when determining the assets of a community one of the key things to look at is at the residents and their talents, skills, and abilities.

To judge the resident’s talents, skills, abilities, and potential for leadership, Beaulieu says that we should look at a community’s key institutions:

One of the best ways to remember what major institutions exist in your community is to think of the word KEEPR. Each letter represents an institution commonly found in most communities. They are as follows:

- **Kinship (Family):** The family carries out a number of important activities, such as the care and socialization of the young, providing food, housing, and nurturing for family members, and the biological reproduction of the human race.
- **Economic:** This involves the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services in a community. The community’s economic system influences the kind of work is available, where jobs are located, how much people earn, the quality of the work environment, the prospects for future jobs, and the level of unemployment and underemployment in the area.
- **Education:** The major function of education is to prepare youth to be successful, contributing members of society upon reaching adulthood. This includes preparing them for the world of work, but also passing on to them knowledge, values, beliefs, and accepted ways of behaving (what we often call “norms”) that we believe young members of our community should learn.
- **Political (Government):** The political (or governmental) institution is the arena in which power and authority is acquired and exercised. Its major functions include: (1) protecting the life, liberty and property of local residents (such as enforcing laws and

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub\\_section\\_main\\_1043.htm](http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1043.htm)

<sup>3</sup> [http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/227/227\\_asset\\_mapping.pdf](http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/227/227_asset_mapping.pdf)

providing police protection); (2) regulating conflict, including developing procedures and practices for resolving disputes; and (3) planning, coordinating, and providing public facilities and services to local residents.

- **Religious:** The religious institution plays an important role in attending to the spiritual needs of local citizens. In addition, it serves as an important source of support for certain moral values, norms, and customs. It also provides residents with personal support in time of need.

- **Associations:** Associations refer to the civic, service, social, fraternal, and other voluntary organizations available for people to participate in local activities. They operate with formal constitutional rules and by-laws, and operate with a team of officers and/or a board of directors.<sup>3</sup>

These institutions can vary in strength and availability for each neighborhood and are fundamental to a community. Additionally, communities often have informal groups that are instrumental to the success of a community. These three things: people, formal institutions, and informal groups are key in the asset-based community development process.

Community development is extremely complex, a community cannot be developed by simply adding more assets. Using indicators is helpful in assessing whether a community is progressing towards sustainability. We are using the Neighborhood Sustainability Indicators Guidebook's definition that "Sustainability is the long-term social, economic, and environmental health of our community"<sup>8</sup>. The two key concepts that their definition derived from are the concepts of equity and integration of lives. These two concepts are found on most definitions of sustainability.

These assets or indicators of sustainability can vary from one community to another, but Swisher, Rezola and Sterns outlined the characteristics of effective sustainability indicators:

1. The indicator reveals links between the economy, society and the environment.
2. The indicator is relevant to all sectors of the community.
3. The indicator addresses the carrying capacity of the community's natural resources and acknowledges ecological limits.
4. The indicator provides a long-term view of the community, looking forward 25 or 50 years rather than 5 or 10.
5. The indicator addresses the question of economic, social and environmental diversity.
6. The indicator is sensitive and adaptable to changing circumstances and conditions.
7. The indicator is clear, simple and unambiguous.
8. The indicator is reliable, providing accurate data and measuring what the community wants to measure.



## An asset is:

“anything that brought value to my neighborhood”

“something that benefits the neighborhood and that would give it some prosperity and make it a place where people would want to reside”

9. The indicator demonstrates to community members how individuals contribute to the overall picture of sustainability.
10. The indicator allows the community to recognize how local sustainability is tied to and dependent on regional and global sustainability, and vice versa. Therefore local progress does not come at the expense of other communities.

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Following these characteristics for sustainability indicators, an example of an indicator of sustainability for North Minneapolis could be the amount of money that the Neighborhood Revitalization Project is investing in a specific neighborhood, or whether a neighborhood is attracting diverse groups of people that are living in the homes (not renting them out).

To address the economic sustainability of North Minneapolis, economic indicators must be developed using these characteristics. For this project we looked at formal institutions and informal groups, in addition to businesses, for the compilation of the base asset inventory. Asset inventories need frequent updating, and it is recommended that community members participate in developing easily-updateable electronic asset map formats (such as GIS mapping) and maintaining them. An Excel spreadsheet that includes many of the assets of North Minneapolis is provided as an addendum to this report. The asset inventory will be later used to map North Minneapolis, by partnering with the Northeast CDC, which offers GIS assistance to neighborhood organizations.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/CD029>

## Focus Groups/Interviews

To supplement the research on how our target group, first time home-buyers, define the assets to be used in asset mapping, we held two focus groups and one interview. We had three focus groups scheduled but due to poor attendance, one group turned into an interview. Both the focus groups participants and the interviewee were asked the same questions.<sup>5</sup>

To develop the questions, information on community assets was used. A Community Assets Survey that was developed by two individuals at a University in Arizona was used as a base for several of the questions.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, a PowerPoint presentation by Susan Jakes was also used in developing the questions.<sup>7</sup> The questions were reviewed by Margo Ashmore, Project Supervisor; Brandi A. Brown; and Rich Goldsmith, Padilla Speer Beardsley (PSB), who arranged use of PSB's facilities to record the group sessions. The two focus groups were held on Tuesday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> from 6-8pm and Tuesday, December 9<sup>th</sup> from 5-7pm. A third focus group was scheduled for Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup> from 10am-12pm at another location, with six participants signed up, but only one person came to the group, so we interviewed her.

To secure participants for the groups we posted information on Craigslist, and sent information out via several listserves. There were 61 people varying in age from 22 to 63 expressed interest in participating, with 37 of those qualifying (first-time home buyer).

There were two key themes that emerged out of the groups (and several other minor themes):

- *The community is extremely important*

"the top two things are that I kind of get a sense of the neighbors living in the community and that it is a diverse community"

"because of my upbringing around community and community development, if your neighbors know each other and they are actively participating in the neighborhood, then [it's] more likely that people are watching out for crime or safety; or there is more opportunities, grants, things that would help keep the neighborhood vital"

"I really liked the sense of community. I think that neighborhood really started to turn around a lot when my parents first moved in and people don't really leave unless it becomes a terrible place to live. I don't know, everyone looks out for everyone and the kids can run around outside. And I think that was nice."

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<sup>5</sup> See addendum 2 for focus group/interview questions.

<sup>6</sup> Jakes, Susan S. & Shannon, Lisa C. (2002). Community Assets Survey.  
<http://ag.arizona.edu/fcs/cyfernet/nowg/CommunityAssetsPacket.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nacdep.net/conf/2007/Presentations/CommunityAssetsSurvey.ppt#1>

- *Knowledge and perception of a community impact home buying*

“even when I lived there I didn’t know that it [neighborhood revitalization] was going on, that it was even attempted,. Just hearing that there are people that are hopeful about it, that there are people who want to make it a better place, give it a better rap. To me that would be huge, that would definitely sway me to consider it, the city of Minneapolis actually wants to spend money and time and effort to make this a better place. I think that that right there alone for me and for others would be drawn to that.”

“I think with a few years you could really overturn a lot of misconceptions, but it’s going to take a little time and a lot of money”

“What they need is a good public relations campaign. That’s what they need so they can overturn all these opinions.”

“It’s just like my total lack of knowledge of that area.”

The minor themes centered around specific aspects of a neighborhood that were considered to be assets. Most commonly cited were: sense of safety, nearness to job, nearness to friends, shops/community café nearby, access to public transportation, and the desire of wanting to be easily found (access to major freeways, ease of finding home, etc). Full transcriptions are in Addendum 3.

## **Conclusion**

Presently, there are many groups working to better the North Minneapolis community. The asset inventory is a step toward understanding the goals and capacity of each, a road map to inform eager contributors so that they can avoid duplication, and instead build on each others’ efforts. The Crossroads Resource Center (CRC) has done a lot of work in community development. The CRC completed an economic analysis on neighborhoods and has developed a guidebook to help communities develop indicators for and work toward sustainability. If we followed the *Neighborhood Sustainability Indicators Guidebook* then The NOMI Project has taken some steps in the right direction. The guidebook recommends:

- Focus on neighborhood assets rather than deficiencies;
- Engage local residents in thoughtful planning;
- Express values that have been formally adopted by community residents;
- Identify the linkages among issues that are often seen as separate in neighborhood action (i.e., "housing," "economic development," "transportation," and "public safety.");
- Focus on the long-term future of the neighborhood; and
- Work toward equitable distribution of resources, opportunity and wealth for the current generation as well as for future generations.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.crcworks.org/guide.pdf>

The NOMI re-branding concept and the “Get to NOMI” slogan have been positively recognized in official city circles, by the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, and the media. The NOMI project is just one prong of a multi-prong strategy in ensuring economic sustainability. Whether The NOMI Project or some other umbrella group does it, a next step would be to compile the strategic plans of existing organizations, synthesize their common themes and concrete achievable action steps.

The most important next step for NOMI is continuing to gain community support and engage residents in telling the positive, authentic stories of what it’s like to live in their neighborhoods. Focus group participants talked often about how influential it is to know someone in a neighborhood where they are considering living. The NOMI Project’s idea of posting “Get to NOMI” placards in individual homes, with a mechanism to contact those people for neighborhood testimonials, should be pursued.

The qualitative information from the focus groups demonstrated that in the absence of direct knowledge, an individual’s perception of a community significantly impacts their decision about whether to buy in that community. For some, the negative perception of North Minneapolis is so strong that they would not live in the area no matter what. One focus group participant expressed that the area is good enough for them to buy and rent out the home, but not good enough for them to actually live there. Concerns about safety and crime were most frequently discussed in reasons why not to live in North Minneapolis. One aspect of any long-term sustainability plan will include attracting residents to the North Minneapolis area by changing the perceptions that others have of the area.

Several participants in the focus groups suggested a variety of different ways for NOMI to increase awareness about the good things in North Minneapolis. Some of the suggested methods were: newspaper articles, interviews with residents, website, asset map, asset inventory, segments on the television news, magazine articles, and tours. These methods should be incorporated into The NOMI Project’s long-term plan as ways to challenge many of the misconceptions about North Minneapolis.

Future projects for research assistants could be 1.) assisting with the public relations campaign by developing an asset map or website of North Minneapolis. 2.) developing economic sustainability indicators by which the community can measure itself. 3.) Compile the strategic plans of existing organizations, synthesize their common themes and concrete achievable action steps, making these known to all key participants. To future readers of this report, for more information about The NOMI Project, call 612-767-1594.